

---

## Book Review

---

Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 272 pp., \$29.50 (pbk), ISBN: 9-780-81393692-5.

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the most urgent problems of humankind today. Numerous scholars, politicians, and activists have been trying to reduce the effects of global warming and find solutions for how to save the planet for future generations. Climate change has proved to be not only a scientific phenomenon but also a cultural one. While the problem has drawn particularly close attention from geographers, chemists, meteorologists, engineers, and other scientists, literary authors, critics, and scholars have been examining the issue of climate change, too, providing a unique cultural understanding of the problem. Climate change as it is reflected in multiple literary works is an important subject yet to be fully investigated by literary and cultural studies scholars. Such an attempt is made by Adam Trexler in his brilliant study of that large a body of climate change narratives—*Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*.

Divided into four chapters, the book examines the relationship between climate change, on the one hand, and science, politics, economy, and literary form, on the other. Introducing the term ‘Anthropocene fictions’, Trexler ‘move[s] beyond the narrow questions of truth and falsity’ (p. 4) when dealing with climate change literature. Analyzing a vast number of climate change novels, the scholar’s primary aim is to investigate ‘how [...] the immense discourse of climate change [has] shaped culture over the last forty years’ (p. 5).

In the first chapter, Trexler zeroes in on the question of truth, examining the intricate relationship between climate change fiction and science, and contending that ‘in a moment characterized by its uncertainty over scientific knowledge, the novel maintains a problematic relationship with the truth of climate change’ (p. 29). In this section, the scholar focuses in particular detail on Michael Crichton’s *State of Fear* (2004) and Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010) to demonstrate that ‘climate change novels are best understood as a force that interacts with climate change, remaking what we know about the climate and the novel at the same time’ (p. 35).

In the second chapter, the author turns to the problem of narrating climate change through fiction. Interpreting multiple climate change texts, among which are J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962), Richard Cowper’s *The Road to Corlay* (1978), George Turner’s *The Sea and Summer* (1987), Maggie Gee’s *The Flood* (2005), and Will Self’s *The Book of Dave* (2006), through the prism of place, Trexler persuasively contends: ‘Fictionalizing climate change is not about falsifying it, or making it imaginary, but rather about using narrative to heighten its reality’ (p. 75).

Trexler then shifts the focus to the questions of politics to claim in Chapter 3 that 'nearly all climate change fiction is political, in one sense or another' (p. 119). Meticulously analyzing US domestic policies, international relations, and environmental activism, Trexler ultimately turns to fiction to showcase how these issues are reflected in some of the most recent climate change novels, including T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of Earth* (2000), Paul McAuley's *The Quiet War* (2008), George Marshall's *The Earth Party: Love and Revolution at a Time of Climate Change* (2008), and Michael Glass's *Ultimatum* (2009), as well as earlier climate change novels like, for example, Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Science in the Capital' trilogy (2004–2007). Concluding that 'there can be no single, ideal representation of the politics of climate change' (p. 167), Trexler overtly hints at both the cultural and political complexity of global warming that, as the examined literary artifacts reveal, humanity is still to understand and come to terms with.

In the final chapter, Trexler attempts to display the influence of climate change on the economy as well as the way fiction deals with this problem. The scholar notes: 'While many novels concentrate the disaster into a single tsunami, climate change's real effects are more distributed: desertification, contamination of freshwater, fiercer tornadoes, extinctions, destroyed mangrove barriers, crop failures, and so on' (p. 170). Turning again to Turner's *The Sea and Summer*, as well as introducing other texts like, for example, Ben Bova's *Empire Builders* (1993), the scholar's main concern is that these novels 'sensitize the reader to what is before us, rather than demanding we turn away in revulsion or "solution"' (p. 170). Trexler also provides his reading of more recent narratives, among which are Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2008) and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2010), and contends that these texts 'explore the complex economic and social adaptations necessary in a period of anthropogenic global warming' (p. 202).

Tackling the issue of climate change and its representation in fiction from multiple perspectives, Trexler's book is not only timely but also a unique contribution to the existing scholarship on global warming. Examining a large body of literary narratives, *Anthropocene Fictions* gives answers to numerous questions pertaining to climate change literature. Yet it also raises crucial issues, stimulating further research in the field of environmental criticism, including the problems of non-existent 'realist climate change novel[s]' and a 'deep cultural resistance to the Anthropocene' (p. 224). These problems are, indeed, yet to be examined. For now, Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* is a must read to everyone who wants to understand the relationship between cultural and literary thought, and climate change. The book will be of interest to both academic and general audiences due to its successful attempt to shed light on yet-to-be-thoroughly explored climate change fiction.

Tatiana Prorokova  
Philipps University of Marburg  
tatiana.prorokova@gmx.de

## References

- Bacigalupi, Paolo. 2010. *The Windup Girl* (San Francisco: Night Shade Books).
- Ballard, J.G. 1962. *The Drowned World* (New York: Berkley Books).
- Bova, Ben. 1993. *Empire Builders* (New York: Tor Science Fiction).
- Boyle, T.C. 2000. *A Friend of Earth* (London: Penguin Books).
- Cowper, Richard. 1978. *The Road to Corlay* (London: Orbit Books).
- Crichton, Michael. 2004. *State of Fear* (New York: HarperCollins).
- Gee, Maggie. 2005. *The Flood* (London: Saqi Books).
- Glass, Michael. 2009. *Ultimatum* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press).
- Lloyd, Saci. 2008. *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (London: Hodder Children's Books).
- Marshall, George. 2008. *The Earth Party: Love and Revolution at a Time of Climate Change* (Brighton: Pen Press).
- McAuley, Paul. 2008. *The Quiet War* (London: Gollanz).
- McEwan, Ian. 2010. *Solar* (London: Jonathan Cape).
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. 2004. *Forty Signs of Rain* (New York: HarperCollins).
- . 2005. *Fifty Degrees Below* (New York: Spectra).
- . 2007. *Sixty Days and Counting* (New York: Spectra).
- Self, Will. 2006. *The Book of Dave* (New York: Viking Press).
- Turner, George. 1987. *The Sea and Summer* (Surrey: Severn House Publishers).